"The EDIT$ (TEXT_STRING) - Newsletter"

A U S T R A L I A N
C O M P U T E R
M U S E U M
S O C I E T Y

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|                                                         |
|        Please imagine a lovely graphic                  |
|                                                         |
|        of an old stone castle or palace                 |
|                                                         |
|        constructed of icons of computers                |
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Formation   Meeting   on   Sunday,   31st July,   at 3pm.

(see page 8 for details)

CONVENOR'S COMMENT

Hello fellow collectors,

Welcome to the world of ultra-high technology where the choices now change faster than you can make sensible decisions. Welcome to the world where everything is headed for micro-processor control - it is almost as if we mere mortals cannot be trusted to burn our own toast without some designer dictating that we need to have an 'automatic' device that cannot be adjusted or repaired.

I have always been a collector - I guess it goes back to my deprived post-war childhood, where toys were scarce and ordinary working people seldom had a telephone, let alone a motor vehicle. I guess my mother had an influence in the stamp collecting department, simple and cheap and kept me off the streets. I now have been saving vintage computer equipment for about ten years - mostly gear that would have ended up as scrap metal if I had not bought it. I now have too much vintage computer hardware and doco.

Am I crazy ? - I thought I might be until I started meeting other collectors at DECUS meetings. These were all users of 'DEC' products and they all had good logical reasons for still using their favourite hardware. Then last Christmas Graeme Philipson did a column on old hardware in The Australian. I spoke to him - as did dozens of other private collectors. He wrote another column; and we all realised that we were not alone, and probably not crazy!

Since then my friends and I have made some decisions. Primary one is that if Sydney can have the Olympics in the year 2000 then it can also have a fully functional Computer Museum. Decision number two - we are almost too late to save the large systems - the big boxes are being scrapped as fast as business can find a desktop replacement. We must act now to preserve whatever is left in the way of mini-computers and mainframes before they all end up as cheap(?) scrap metal. Let's start real collecting now!

In this issue:- July, 1994. First edition.

Some Early Computing in Australia.

Thirty years ago, in 1964, I got my first hands-on computing experience. It was soon after I had started working for the Institute of Highway and Traffic Research at the University of New South Wales. They had an IBM 1620 system that was set up to run Fortran II from punch cards. It was a research tool and the officer in charge of the system, Stan Yan, got anyone who was interested in at 8am to give us quick lessons in Fortran on the 1620. I was then hooked. Better than all my boyhood dreams of being an engine-driver (steam that is).

I later discovered that my then boss, Ron Keith, had worked on a tracking/guidance computer at Woomera. He never said much about it, but that portion of history should by now be declassified. We need to locate these one-off designers.

As a schoolboy in the late 1950s I used to visit Silliac at Sydney University on Open Days. Real magic stuff. Similar copies of ENIAC were also implemented in the CSIRO and other Universities. Most of these have their history documented by those that built or used them, in various academic papers.

I believe that LEO machines were sold here in the early days (and that there is a group who keep in touch). How many other systems were in use here commercially before 1960 ? How many of the makers have survived to 1994 ? How can we contact the employees from the original installations ?

By 1960 most Universities had more than one computer and big businesses were buying off-the-shelf systems. Remember that the IBM 360 series were being sold in 1965, and that there was plenty of competition around by then. In fact the PDP-1 from Digital was announced in 1960 with deliveries in 1961.

The first minicomputer in Australia was a PDP-5 sold to BHP Research Labs in Newcastle in 1963. The first timeshare system in Australia was a PDP-6 at University of WA in 1964. In 1965 Digital introduced the PDP-8, and minicomputers were an accepted alternative. [The PDP-5 is workable in the local Digital museum, along with a working PDP-8 system. Sadly DEC in the US announced last year that support for PDP1, PDP4, PDP5, PDP6, PDP7, PDP9, PDP12, PDP14, PDP15 and some PDP-11 models would cease from 30/7/94; after only 30 years !!!.]

There must be dozens if not hundreds of systems that need proper documenting in a central archive. We need the help of all Australians to help assemble and collate the memoirs of the people involved in early Australian computing.

Why the 'Australian Computer Museum Society' ?

- some Aims and Objectives.

"Ever since the days of ENIAC, the rallying cry of computing has been 'Let's chuck the old stuff to make room for the new stuff!!' - and hardware is scrapped, with the hardware goes the documentation, goes the information, leaving only the thin thread of memory which snaps too. Leaving aside some dubious precursors, electronic computing is fifty-five years old, microcomputing is less than twenty years old, and we're shedding the pertinent history by the truckload. The history of digital computing -- one of the newest core sciences in the world -- is being destroyed as fast as it's being made."

How can we as an association help preserve computer history ?

*   Create awareness of the history of computing as a real, evolving and valuable phenomenon.

*   Prevent the destruction of historically significant hardware, software and documentation.

*   Strengthen the cooperation among existing institutions that safeguard the history of computing.

*   Begin discussions among developers and computer-related manufacturers about setting up an overall archive.

*   Ultimately, to help build a coalition that can build and endow a libraries and museums of computing history.

The above quote and action items are from the Californian group, with similar goals to those people who started this group. They help demonstrate the philosophies that many of us have with regard to local computing history. We cannot achieve our aims in isolation - we need to promote the ideas behind the museum society at the same time as we begin preservation of the systems themselves.

Our society objectives may be:-

+ To advance and extend the knowledge of computing throughout Australia.

+ To promote and develop an appreciation and understanding of computer systems by all Australians.

+ To further the study, application and practice of computing in Australia and other areas.

In specific terms our aims could be:-

- To encourage our members and others in the community to preserve examples of all practical computer systems.

- To document and publicise the achievements of Australians in the advancement of computing throughout the world.

- To represent our members and other owners or collectors of computer systems at a local, regional, state, national and international level.

- To cooperate with any other museum or like minded group to preserve examples of computer systems.

- To establish collections of equipment and systems, libraries of programmes and documentation, and databases of information relevant to the history of computing.

- To promote the exhibition of historic computer systems and associated materials through members, or the computer industry or commercial groups or through any museum or like minded group prepared to display computer systems.

- To do or concur in doing all such acts, deeds, matters and things and to enter into and make such arrangements as are conducive to the attainment of the aims and objectives of the society and to establish funds for the carrying out of the above aims.

Proposed Rules for the Society.

Initially the Rules of the society will be based on the model rules for incorporation of associations as given out by the NSW Department of Consumer Affairs. These will then be modified and adapted to reflect our aims and objectives.

When we have adapted the rules a special meeting will be called to adopt them and forward them for incorporation.

Following incorporation in NSW we will be able to apply to the Australian Securities Commission for recognition as an Australia-wide organisation. This should allow us to set up branch organisations or to do business in other states.

In many ways our rules will need to reflect the operations of a museum, even though we may never set up a public museum ourselves. We will also need to enter into formal contracts eg renting space, accepting donations, lending or borrowing exhibits and must be formally set up to handle these things.

Your committee will appreciate all comments and suggestions re the rules or the aims and objectives of the society.

Other Computer Collections in Australia and Overseas.

As a Sydney resident the most obvious is the new Powerhouse Museum at Pyrmont. They now have a significant collection of hardware but I have been told that they have very little in the way of software or manuals and hence most of their old systems are unusable other than for static displays. I also believe that the management of the Powerhouse Museum believe that they have enough computer equipment on display. Sadly I don't recollect any Australian content in their displays. I would imagine that most state Arts and Science museums would have similar attitudes and problems.

The next best source of collections around Australia seems to be those associated with Computer Science or Engineering departments in Universities. There seems to be a trend for those who souvenired varied items from old machines being discarded to return them for storage and/or display. The big problem with University collections would appear to be that they will only be accessible to the public on 'Open Days'. Second problem will be the limited space available for many examples of 'complete working systems'. Similar problems would exist for the old systems kept by the computer makers.

In my visits to user groups and non-computer organisations I frequently meet or am told of people with an old micro or other item stored away, gathering dust. These, I believe, will be the real saviours of Australian Computing history. When Graeme Philipson wrote about his old Sorcorer in The Australian last Christmas - he found dozens of people out there with their own little collections. We really need to unite these individuals and catalogue their collections.

In England the Computer Conservation Society, part of the British Computer Society, has taken over most of Bletchley Park as a museum facility and intends to rebuild 'Colossus Mark I' along with many other projects. We will try to keep members informed of their activities. They obviously have significant government support for their activities.

In the USA the Boston Computer Museum is the most famous. It was originally started by Digital and contained many unique machines. Many recent report have lamented the disappearance of the 'old-iron' displays, as the museum seems to be trying to attract the school-age tours with 'gee-whiz video game' type displays. They are apparently suffering financially due to minimal or no government funding.

There is now a Californian Computer Conservation Society who were founded about a year ago. Their fourth newsletter is now 60-plus pages and growing rapidly. They are collecting computers and also documenting local historic developments.

We will be cooperating with as many groups as possible.

Urgent need for storage space for collections.

SPACE   SPACE   SPACE   and more   SPACE.

We cannot hope to preserve or restore or display historic
computers without space. The general rule with technology
is 'the older the equipment - the bigger it is' and our
computers follow this rule in general.

All our members and friends are urged to be on the lookout
for any spare space that we could use for computer storage.
In general the only requirements are that it be SECURE and
DRY. All the better if it is clean, but not critical.

We will look at any offers (not necessarily free) for any
size that is available. Obviously an upstairs space is not
suitable for heavy systems if there is no lift. Working
space will need light and power etc, and after-hours access
for volunteer conservationists. Other systems may not be
touched for many years and could be stored away from the
city or in top-security vaults.

TALK to your FRIENDS about any unused space ANYWHERE - NOW.

Equipment Fostering Scheme -- Adopt a Mini-Computer System.

One plan to help solve the space problem for older machines
is to get members and their friends to "Mind-a-Mini" until
we have sufficient space for all our systems. All you need
is a spare corner in the study or den or garage or even the
bedroom - we will supply a traditional equipment rack that
is approximately 24" wide and 30" deep, filled with vintage
processor, disks, tapes, communications equipment, etc, etc.
You will have something unusual to mention to your friends
and we will get publicity and possible new members, etc.

Remote Storage Facilities - Out of Town Storage Space.

For a lot of our equipment - whether it is spare parts or
incomplete systems - it may be practical to securely pack
items that are not likely to be used for a number of years
into weatherproof shipping containers and store them away
from the high rents of the capital cities. We would need
some suitable containers and help in fitting them out with
brackets and locking mechanisms to prevent damage during
shipping. I know we could find places to store them in the
country. Can we find a shipping company sponsor that would
help us move them around the country when required ?

Note - WE WILL NEED STORAGE SPACE IN ALL STATES and CITIES

Coming Events, suggested Society Calendar.

July 31,	15:00	Inaugral Meeting at Veteran Car Club Hall 134 Queens Road, Fivedock. All welcome.

Please RSVP 02-764 4855 if attending. This meeting will decide on the formation of an Australian Museum Society. Please bring your membership fees (suggested $50 or $20 stud/pens) so that we can know if there will be sufficient support for the museum.

August,	1994	Incorporation in NSW as non-profit Society
September,	1994	Set up office facility on part-time basis. Initially manned by volunteers and vintage answering machine. Newsletter Number 2.
October,	1994	Set up Computer DataBase system for memberships and Registers for hardware, software and documentation collections.
November,	1994	Newsletter Number 3, and start of national survey of vintage computer equipment.
December,	1994	Should have Meeting Room and Workshop area established. Xmas party in own premises.
January,	1995	Organise bulk storeroom for hardware and documentation storage.
July,	1995	Organise Software Archive for controlled storage of Australian Software.
October,	1995	Start lending out exhibits to corporate members for displays in foyers, etc.
July,	1996	Establish non-profit company that will operate the 'fully functional computer museums' around Australia.
July,	1998	Opening of first public Computer Museum with working exhibits in Australia.
January,	1999	Opening of second public Computer Museum.
April,	1999	Opening of third public Computer Museum.
01-JAN-00		Watch obsolete programs cause havoc with 'invalid date format' messages ....

Note: the editor is keen to publicise any event which may be of interest to Computer Museum collectors. Please give as much notice as possible for interstate or overseas events.

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